DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 180 231 FL 010 859

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TITLE Language Syllabus Planning for the Development of Communicative Skills. Occasional Paper 3.
INSTITUTION Linguistics Inst. of Ireland, Dublin.
PUB DATE 78
NOTE 23p.; Edited version of lecture presented to the Linguistics Institute of Ireland (Dublin, Ireland, May 12, 1978)
AVAILABLE FROM Institiuid Teangeolaiocht'a Eireann (Linguistics Institute of Ireland), 31 Fitzwilliam Place, Dublin 2, Ireland (One pound)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Classroom Communication; *Communicative Competence (Languages); *Curriculum Design; *Instruction; Integrated Curriculum; *Language Instruction; *Language Skills; *Second Language Learning; Student Motivation

ABSTRACT

The relation of communicative skills to language syllabus planning is discussed. The most important part of the foreign language syllabus is course content. Foreign language teaching is primarily a matter of starting with the world of everyday knowledge which the learner already possesses. The foreign language syllabus should be designed to take advantage of the learner's native language concepts and experience. Awareness of the different ways in which the target language and culture refer to facts, values, events and communicative situations should be inculcated. The Council of Europe's four types of motivation are defined and illustrated. A communicative syllabus must have both content and purpose, using integrated methods. No one method has been shown to give better results than any other. Different methods must be used as learners themselves differ. Communication between teacher and pupil in the classroom should not be neglected. Foreign language learning is no longer product-oriented, but process-oriented. (Author)

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INSTITIÚID TEANGEOLAÍOCHTA ÉIREANN

PÁIPÉAR ÓCÁIDE: 3

(OCCASIONAL PAPER: 3)

LANGUAGE SYLLABUS PLANNING

FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS

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INSTITIÚID TEANGEOLAÍOCHTA ÉIREANN

AND THE

IRISH ASSOCIATION FOR APPLIED LINGUISTICS

LANGUAGE SYLLABUS PLANNING
FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS

PROFESSOR H. - E. PIEPHO

Proceedings of a Public Lecture given by Professor Piepho under the joint auspices of Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann *and the* Irish Association for Applied Linguistics *on 12 May, 1978 in the College of Technology, Kevin St., Dublin.*

EDITOR: NORA FRENCH

Publication No. 12(B)

Price: £1.00

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31, Fitzwilliam Place,
Dublin 2.

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31, Plás Mhic Liam,
Baile Átha Cliath 2.

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INSTITIÚID TEANGEOLAÍOCHTA ÉIREANN

and the

IRISH ASSOCIATION FOR APPLIED LINGUISTICS

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Hans-Eberhard Piepho has been Professor at Giessen University in West Germany since 1973. He is at present Director of the Institute for the Teaching of English (Language and Literature) as a Foreign Language in that University. He has represented the Federal Republic of Germany on many occasions as a member of international commissions and at conferences on modern language teaching sponsored by the Council of Europe. He has travelled as an adviser on foreign language syllabus reform in Turkey, Morocco, Yugoslavia and the Netherlands and is at present a member of the Council of Europe team working on syllabus definition in modern languages.

Dr. Piepho visited Ireland on the invitation of Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann and the Irish Association for Applied Linguistics and gave a public lecture in Dublin on 12 May, 1978 entitled *Language Syllabus Planning for the Development of Communicative Skills*. On the following day he conducted a workshop on the design of a modern language teaching unit. On each occasion Dr. Piepho's lecture was followed by questions and discussions. This paper is an edited version of Dr. Piepho's public lecture, and the post-lecture discussion. Final amendments to the script have been kindly supplied by Dr. Piepho.

Nora French

Modern Languages Adviser,
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LANGUAGE SYLLABUS PLANNING FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS

I had a very interesting discussion this afternoon in one of your curriculum development units. The person I was talking to had nothing to do with foreign language instruction but with environmental studies. Very soon, however, the talk came around to the significance of language in the child's perception of his surroundings and to the fact that one cannot use language without first of all having something to say. After a short while, we found that we were fundamentally in agreement that we do not teach a language but we teach what to do with a language; we teach the subject that we are referring to with language or through language; we do not teach literature — we cannot — but we make provision for learners to understand literature. This illustrates two essential points that are observed in modern language curriculum and syllabus design: to identify the uses for which the language is taught and to identify the types of understanding that the learner will need to deal with written texts, spoken texts and the daily communication that takes place around him.

The first point to be taken into consideration when planning a syllabus for European learners is that it is known from statistics and from research that every European has some knowledge of many European languages. A German nine year old can identify spoken English, French and Italian. He may have some doubts about Turkish but that depends on where he lives in Germany. We have discovered that most twelve year olds can identify as many as seventeen different languages. This includes languages such as Roumanian which they may not at first recognise as Roumanian but which they hypothesise to be a language somewhat similar to Spanish. The children are able to recognise all these languages because we live in a world where communication is constantly going on in the air waves over our heads. There is no such thing as a real beginner who knows nothing about a language. When a German child enters a classroom, he has mastered about two hundred and sixty statistical words in English, starting off with *cow-boy*, *gentleman*, *lady*, *o.k.*, to more complex concepts. Take the following short dialogue:-

"Oh! a wonderful swimming-pool!"
"Help!"
"What's your problem, madame?"
"My make-up!"

If the German child is exposed to this, he will get great amusement from it because he will feel he understands it. On the other hand, if the lesson is centred on "This is a pencil, this is a pen", it will rapidly lead to the Queen Victoria effect in language teaching — the pupils will not be amused. The child does not need to be told the object is a pen; he knows it is a pen but he just does not know the words in English. It is better to say "We call this a pen", or to ask, "What do you call this?". Even then, the word pen should only be introduced if it is really needed by the pupil and not simply because it figures in the syllabus.

I have received a number of interesting pieces of information about the school system in this country from some talks which I have had since arriving here and from rapidly reading the papers which have been produced by the group working on modern language syllabus definition. From the little I know, I will briefly outline the situation with which I believe you must cope. I do this because different countries have different problems and I cannot come to Ireland as a European expert with all the solutions for your situation.

Pupils start languages at the age of twelve. The teaching is normally across the ability range, in mixed ability groups, which does not please all teachers. (However, this is the same all over the world because the teaching of modern languages to mixed ability groups is very difficult). I understand that much of the teaching is directed towards set examination standards and set books so that from university entrance down, the syllabus is very well lined up according to these standards. This has to be taken into consideration whenever change is advocated because change must begin from the present situation to which everyone is accustomed. Teachers are accustomed to teach the present syllabus, the learners are accustomed to being taught the present syllabus and, in particular, the parents want their children to go smoothly up the path to the desired ends in the educational system. It is not possible to adopt a completely new philosophy and to change the syllabus totally. Such an approach will not work.

These points may serve as a general introduction to my paper.

FUNDAMENTAL ASSUMPTIONS

CONTENTS:

I will first make some very general statements about assumptions which can be referred to, perhaps, as universal. To me, the contents are the most essential part of the syllabus. What matters in a foreign language syllabus is not the structures, the progression or the dialogues, but what the dialogues are about; it is not the texts which matter but what the texts are about. The objectives in foreign language instruction are not how to form the subjunctive in French, how to form "if" clauses in English. These are items; the latter is an item expressing the conditional and its result. The contents and the objectives of a course and the intended skills profile depend very much on the role the target language plays in the learner's daily experience and on his immediate and mediated 'knowledge'. By immediate knowledge I mean that kind of knowledge which you and I need in order to survive. For example, we know how to operate a car. Children do not, but they know how it is operated and how one gets into it. Children know how to stand up, how to talk, how to address people. They know what to expect from elderly people, what to expect from the teacher, from their mother and their father and from their peers. All that is daily routine knowledge, which is, in fact, very complicated and becomes more and more complex. It is the knowledge with which the learner masters and predicts what happens in life, which de Bono refers to as the immediate constituant knowledge that every human being in a modern society possesses. I feel that when you teach a foreign language, you must start from this realm of everyday knowledge that the learner already has. He also has a mediated knowledge, because every day he is hooked on to the global information system of the world through radio and television. The learner knows much more than I did in my early days about what is going on in the world. This knowledge is not particularly well-organised or structured, so that the task of the school these days is not so much to teach the learner about the world but to organise his knowledge, to put it into proper slots and to make sense of it for him.

What the learner can learn and understand has very much to do with his everyday experience and if, for example, French has nothing to do with his everyday experience, he will have difficulty understanding French and using French. One has to start off in a different way in this case so that the learner sees for himself the part French can play in his immediate experience. First, he must be exposed to the language. One must get him to listen to it in the classroom and then to speak in his mother tongue about what he has heard rather than having him either mimic or identify with the French. We have found in our research programmes that in many instances once a non-motivated learner is exposed to listening to French — which he could have listened to on the

radio before,but he would not have dreamt of doing so — his contact with that particular language is strengthened and he is made aware of the language in his own surroundings as he had not been aware before. This listening stage may last for from two to four weeks. The learner may also be sent around to people in his locality who have been to France and who speak French. He can collect all sorts of information from them and make a collage with it. This is not just a matter of motivating the learner. By being made aware of the presence of French in his own environment, his attitudinal disposition for widening contact with the language is being strengthened.

Another point which must be taken into consideration is that no target language will convey insights, information, concepts and action structures that go beyond the concepts, values and elements of knowledge acquired by the learner through learning. In Germany many of our school text-books have imaginary characters such as Monsieur Dupont or Billy Ball. These people are all flat characters. The learner is then required to identify with what these people do, which he cannot. In our research programmes, we drew up round characters but found that the learner still looked on the figures as puppets producing meaningless French for no conceivable purpose, and the learner saw his task as memorising the rote-learning elements of the dialogue. The teachers, indeed, support this rote-learning by using audio-visual skills methods. In these methods the French in the dialogue is meaningless because the particular situation in the dialogue is not authentic and will never occur, especially not to the young learner. For example, once round characters are introduced into the texts it very soon becomes obvious that dialogue such as "Would you pass the sugar please?" or "May I have some more coffee?" is only ritual which is performed when people meet for the first time and use this kind of conversation to fill in the awkward silence at the table. Later on, all these things go without saying. The young learner may never have been exposed to a situation where people behave in that manner. When asked what he would do if he had to have a meal with a foreigner, he comes up with suggestions such as asking the foreigner in advance what he likes and then placing it near him. The learner can very well imagine what one would say and do at the breakfast-or the dinner-table and then can ask how that can be done in French. This is more meaningful to him than learning by heart what has come his way through the tape-recorder and the film-strip, where the scene is something like breakfast at Tiffany's.

Many people suggest that we should teach tourist French or tourist English because every tourist needs French when he goes to France. However, many of your pupils will never go to France. Many of those who do go as tourists will be in a group with an interpreter and so will never make the kind of contacts which the Threshold Level, for example, foresees for them. Although the learners have well-developed minds and a well-developed set of social values and can operate very well within that scope, they cannot identify themselves with the type of situation where they will go as individual tourists or as a single family to the foreign country. To teach them the tourist language, it would first of all be necessary to teach them the social behaviour of tourists and then the language. It cannot be taken for granted that the learner can identify with someone trying to explain to the customs officer why he had to bring so much whiskey into the country. We ought to take into account very seriously the fact that the learner has already mastered a full set of communicative skills. We ought to take advantage of this rather than making him mentally identify with situations that he is not in and that he will not be in in the near future. This does not mean that we cannot call on the learner's imagination in certain cases. In fact we do, through necessity,but not beyond the scope of the learner's acquired set of skills and values.

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Yet in this approach, the acquisition of a second inventory of words, syntax and text formants in itself constitutes a new form of cognition, recognition and awareness. There is no loss in the content of cultural and socio-cultural variety. We start off from the learner and his own experience, then take this experience, widen and vary it. The learner will soon find out either consciously or subconsciously that he cannot transfer what he wants to say directly from his mother tongue to the foreign language without trying out new forms and formants of thought in the other language. After a certain time one can proceed to situations of contact with foreigners, but not as a starting point.

Therefore, the foreign language curriculum should be designed in such a way that it takes advantage of the learner's L_1 concepts, general and everyday "orientation and survival knowledge" and the rules that guide his communicative behaviour. It should also specify the specific insights the learners need in order to become aware of and sensitive to the peculiar ways in which the target language and culture refer to facts, values, events and structures, social and discoursal communicative events.

MOTIVATION:

Motivation for L_2 use in receptive and productive communication may be specified and divided, as in the Council of Europe documents, into four different kinds. The first type of motivation can be referred to as developmental: the learner should feel he is developing in some way, perhaps by acquiring a new sound system or a new skill of playing with the language rather than being called upon to produce the proper subjunctive, the proper past tense, in French or whatever. This type of motivation was easily observable in an English class which I attended some time ago. The teacher brought in an orange, an apple, a toy car and a toy bus. She said to the pupils, "Look what I have got", which was clever. Most German teachers would say, "What is this?" and then immediately get back, "This is an apple", instead of "That ....". Also, the question itself is ridiculous as everyone knows what "this" is. It is better to say either, "What is that in English" or "Look what I have got", which calls for the answer, "A car? No? An apple? An orange?". In this particular class, there was one little boy who said in English that he could not see the object so the teacher asked another boy who knew exactly what answer the teacher wanted. He had seen the teacher's strategy. Nevertheless the first boy was quite justified in being puzzled because in answer to the question "what have I got?", it is not normal to say "a car" but a "a Jaguar", or "a Mercedes". There were two other boys in the class who had been talking and pushing and pulling each other, much to the discomfort of the teacher, because the professor and some of the students from the university were present. She corrected the boys but one of them shrugged his shoulders and whispered something to the other. Fortunately the microphone was near the boy so that it was possible to identify what he had said. He had, in fact, said that the teacher should not disturb them. We felt this was a rather nasty remark as they were learners, after all, and were supposed to be attentive. We asked them to explain to us why they had said this. The answer they gave justified these learners also; that what they had been talking about was interesting, that they knew the other boy would eventually come up with the answer; that they also knew that apple, orange, car and bus do not normally go together so that they were waiting for the grammar. When the grammar was introduced into the lesson, they were quite contented, paid attention and performed adequately.

This class provides an example of teaching across the ability range. There was the data-collector, who picked up quickly what the teacher wanted and was able to answer; there was the rule-seeker who said, "What is the rule? I haven't got the rule"; then there was the concept learner who said, "Come on, where is the concept? Apples do not normally go with cars and buses". In their own way, each of the learners had developed a mental interest in the lesson,

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and could explain why they could not answer the teacher. Only those boys who had identified themselves with the teacher's strategy — the future teachers perhaps — could answer the teacher to her satisfaction, and they were appreciated by the teacher. This is one of the worst dangers that we teachers fall in to, expecting the pupils to understand our teaching strategy, which is very difficult for them to do. We would do better to try to understand why they cannot do some of the things we ask them to as, very often, they are wiser than we are.

The second type of motivation is instrumental. The learner becomes aware that it can be very interesting to fit things together in the language, to solve problems in the language, to understand a text in the language. This brings in the question of texts in syllabus writing. Very often it is felt that the text given to the beginning learner should contain language identical with the output which we expect from him. This is an enormous mistake, however, because the learner can understand much faster and much more than he would ever be able to reproduce. Reading and listening in themselves are skills in which the learner can acquire competence. When the learner is exposed to a written or spoken text, he may understand the whole text quite well, even if he does not understand the exact meaning of 30% of its lexical content, which is the way everybody reads a newspaper. This again means that the text itself must be interesting for the learner. One way of making it interesting is to have a topical theme. There are problems here however: the topical texts in the newspapers are too difficult and the teacher cannot write out a topical text himself every evening. Those texts are most interesting which have a lasting dramatic element of affinity for the learners. All twelve year olds are interested in dogs and cats. Yet they are more likely to find more interesting and intricate texts about pets in their own language than they would find in the foreign language. Therefore we suggest that organising the instrumental interest in texts is a matter of advance organising. Let us take an example to clarify this. Any learner in Germany and, I am sure, in Ireland would be able to identify this situation and the task involved:-

"Hallo! Ist da Manchester 892548?"

"Ja, Billows".

"Ach, entschuldige bitte. Hier ist Piepho. Könnte ich mit Carol sprechen?"

"Nein, es tut mir Leid. Sie spielt gerade Tennis".

"Oh, vielen Dank. Ich rufe später nochmal an. Danke".

That is a very simple dialogue but it serves as the advance organiser for anything that comes afterwards. One can have a more complicated and complex task such as this:-

"This is London 714002. Jane speaking".

"Hello. This is Peter. Could I have a word with your father?".

"No, I am afraid he is gone to the dentist".

"Oh, do you know when he will be back?".

"Well, he said about five thirty".

"Thank you".

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The learner can very soon find an instrumental way of solving the problem. In the beginning, if he cannot solve it on his own, the language is fed in to him. Then he feeds the language out again or it fades away. Very soon, the learner is not content to be Jean or Tom but he wants to solve in his own way the same sort of problem that Tom has within a well-organised situation of this nature. We prefer this problem-solving approach to a dialogue. This is a classic situation which has nothing to do with flat characters, where anyone would act in a similar fashion. The learner's interest, in this case, is of an instrumental nature.

At a certain stage, the learner may be led to become more interested in the language through integrational motivation. For some of the learners, integrational motivation can be provided by their father, for example, having a French friend or by visiting France themselves. In such circumstances it is quite clear to the learner that he needs French for the purpose of surviving in another socio-cultural setting, of getting in touch with people, of meeting and greeting them, of opening contact or continuing a contact, of making a propositional act and then closing a contact. He may feel that it is interesting to learn something about children from other countries and he may read texts with the intention of finding out how other people live. Then, of course, he will not be satisfied with text centered on such themes as M. Dupont going to the bistro by metro and then returning home to have a silly conversation with his wife. That is the sort of information the learner can organise for himself. It is more worthwhile for the learner to find out something about M. Dupont's life and work and what the difficulties are. Therefore, it is texts of an experimental sort which are needed, texts which may provide contrastive information on how people behave differently in different situations, or in the same situation,and which pose the question of why these people behave differently. The motive is to try to understand that people behave differently from ourselves and from one another because of different status, different family background and different situations.

Finally, there is ideational motivation which breaks up ethno-centric ideas about one's own language, one's own experience of values in one's own country. It is quite an interesting experience for a Frenchman to discover that there is no objection to talking about the weather in Ireland and in England although to him this may seem to be very low behaviour. Likewise it is very interesting for the German pupil to discover the responsibility of a British child in school to behave adequately as a part of that school. When there is a shop-lifting case, the British headmaster can call the culprit up and reprimand him. In Germany if the headmaster did this, the boy would walk out on him because it is none of the headmaster's business unless the shop-lifting has taken place during school hours. The headmaster is only considered responsible for teaching and learning in the school. He is not concerned with the pupils' outside behaviour and if he does mention this, he is interfering with the pupils' privacy and his habeas corpus rights. To begin with, finding that people in another country function in a different way may give rise to a negative reaction from the students but later on they come to understand that these differences are in keeping with the pattern of life within that society and that they are valid.

SYLLABUS:

A communicative syllabus aims at communication in two directions. It is an integrated process of content, purposes, methods and evaluation as interdependent factors. The content, whether it is "family life in France", "good behaviour at a dinner party", "the Irish school system" or

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"the philosophy of Hobbes" must have a clear purpose. It must be connected in some way with the learner's life. The learner has not the time to learn about Hobbes simply because the teacher feels it should be part of his education. The learner should not be obliged to learn French either simply because it is the thing to do. He is very well aware that many people learn French very fast and very efficiently when they are actually in France or when they need to learn French for a specific purpose. When he sees others, perhaps his father or mother,or his friend's father,following an intensive course in French and learning to function admirably in a very restricted way after six weeks, he is not necessarily convinced that it is worthwhile spending a long time on French at school. He must be convinced that there is a purpose which has something to do with his own life, with his own use of the language. We sometimes replace this purpose by examinations because we do not trust that we can come up with a good purpose, but to make the examinations the purpose is in my opinion below the dignity of human beings in these days. In my part of Germany it would be considered ridiculous nowadays to think of language learning in terms of examinations, to replace a properly designed syllabus and curriculum by examinations which have nothing to do with language learning. This is not to say that there should not be a good evaluation system to monitor the learner's progress with both self-assessment and external assessment. Nevertheless, the starting-point of designing a syllabus must be the content and purpose, rather than examinations and lock-step teaching.

The methods used with a communication syllabus must be integrated. There are people who support the situational method or the direct method, the generative method or the audio-visual structural-global method. However, there is no such thing as the method. No significant predominance of one method over any other method has ever been proved in any research findings of which I am aware. At the same time, some of these methods are good and some are bad, not as global methods but as techniques to use in the classroom. The lesson can begin with language on the blackboard, with a situation or dialogues,by demonstrating something concrete and then attributing names to it. All these are methodological sequences which either work or not. They have a certain value, not as global approaches but as specific solutions to specific learning problems. Since different learners have different learning problems, one has to use different teaching methods,as in my example of the data-collector or the item-learner, the concept-learner and the rule-seeker. All three needed a different approach from the teacher, whereas in that class, the method used only suited the boy who understood the teacher's concept. The concept-learner should have had the opportunity to have a close look at the car to see what model it was. Then he could have answered that it was a Mercedes 200, which would have been significant to him. The rule-seeker would have benefited from being told the grammatical rule at an earlier point in the lesson.

The final factor is evaluation,which is an essential component in syllabus design and which I have already mentioned.

In the syllabus, these interdependent factors are dependent on

(a) language use as a communicative process
and (b) language learning as a communicative process.

For a long time, a number of colleagues and myself were mistaken in this matter. We believed in teaching language communicatively and in having models of authentic speech in the classroom for this purpose. In our teaching, we used authentic representations of situations, of topics in those situations, of semantic areas and of exponents. We taught the pupils the functions for that particular situation, breaking it down into small units until eventually the learner could function adequately in the situation. The situation, however, was always outside the classroom. This, in my opinion, was a very big mistake. We forgot

about the communication within the classroom itself which is the primary communication between teacher and pupils. We should analyse what goes on in the classroom and organise it into situations and functional units. What we do with language in the classroom, how we interact in the classroom, how we get communication going, is of major importance. The teacher should be aware not only of his acts but also of his moves. This means that when he writes the lesson on the board, he should write the new vocabulary on one side; in the middle, the structural elements and the main semantic input of the lesson; on the other side, any necessary grammatical explanations. The teacher can then cover up part of the blackboard to concentrate for some time on one of these aspects. In this way the teacher's moves are immediately clear to the learner. He can see whether the teacher is talking about the meaning of the language or the form or whether he is giving an explanation of the language in meta-linguistic form. These moves can be very important, because the learner must know what aspect the teacher is dealing with. Other moves can be clearly signalled by having an organised set of gestures and mime which the teacher might use, a gesture for "repeat", for example.

ERROR TOLERANCE:

"The terms correct and incorrect are of no significance in modern language teaching". This was said by Edwin Cornelius Jr. in 1932. He continued: "It either becomes clear to the learner or it does not, that the item happens or does not happen to be part of the language system". In this way a gesture for "repeat" such as a slight raising of the brow should be accompanied by a little smile of apology to indicate to the learner that he has done something wrong but that the gesture is not a repressive correction of that mistake. It is understood that the learner makes mistakes and that there must be an error tolerance. If the error tolerance is narrowed down for any reason, the learner must be aware of this. It is unnatural to concentrate on avoiding mistakes, because when we speak any language in real situations, we make errors.

In syllabus design, it is essential to identify and specify very clearly the error tolerance that will be allowed within certain phases of language use. Once language use is understood to be a communicative process and language learning a communicative process also, allowances must be made for mistakes. Once the learner concentrates on expressing what he wants to say, he is liable to make mistakes. The teacher must organise his methods in such a way that there is ample time for exercises and drills where the learner must try to avoid mistakes. The learner knows that in these exercises he must concentrate on language items rather than on the expression and use of language. It should be remembered that on this matter, I am teaching as a German in a German situation and as a teacher of a very simple language, namely, English. It is a slightly different matter for teachers of Russian. It may be necessary to concentrate for a longer time on the items, on the verbal system and the meaning, but once some language has been acquired, it should be used in order to do something. The learners should be encouraged to hypothesise what they can do with it. Language use as a communicative process calls for correctness or adequacy, but the language learning process calls for defective use of language. If the teacher in the classroom only uses strategies which enable the learner to avoid mistakes, he is liable to follow very narrow, neatly arranged paths which soon become well trodden and very boring. Here I am referring to the pattern drill which we have all employed for a long time, which is very good in itself but only as a transitory step in any lesson or course.

THE OPEN SYLLABUS CONCEPT:

Syllabus design does not mean listing the complete scheme of what should be learnt, how and how fast it should be learnt. In Giessen, we regard it as a framework of curricular specifications, of didactic and methodological principles,

of possible themes, topics, notions, functions and learnable exponents. Therefore, when we talk about a syllabus we do not replace the old prescribed texts by prescribed notions, functions and situations which are to be driven home and learnt, but we specify certain tasks which should be mastered at a certain age or a certain phase. Whether or not the learner masters each and every task at that moment is a different question. We must take into account that some learners learn slowly because of their background and perhaps the functioning of their psyches, but they should be aware of the meaning of the same language which the other pupils master. It is only the form of the language which the slower learner masters inadequately. The slow learner should be treated as a normal human being who happens to speak broken French, just as there are adults who speak broken French and others who speak French fluently. This learner participates in the same communicative activity but he may not come up with the same amount of appropriate and correct French words. Every learner should understand that other learners are not as fast as they are, that it is not a matter of being proud and looking down on the others but of understanding why one learns fast and the other does not.

To return to the syllabus, the learnable exponents are organised in such a manner that regional and local teacher's workshops, textbook writers and administrators can derive content, functions, objectives, items and suggestions from the printed frame syllabus. The syllabus enables teachers, within the limited scope of time that they can allow for their own decisions, and text book writers, within the limited time of text book production, to derive solutions, but the syllabus does not offer the solutions. The syllabus contains the exponents and the functions and topics which fit into the Irish situation or the German situation, which have been tested by empirical scholarly and scientific means. These are then turned into concrete language teaching materials either by a text-book writer, a curriculum development scheme or, in very rare instances, by the teachers themselves.

LEVELS OF ATTAINMENT:

The foreign language learner needs insights, skills, mastery, receptive and productive abilities on several levels of attainment. The language to be attained is viewed as a system in form and as a system in behaviour. We have suggested that, in some instances, the levels of attainment should be specified in the levels A to H. I will describe below one of these specifications which is intended for schools. The Council of Europe has devised three different levels, the waystage level, the threshold level and the language for specific purposes. There are also different levels of meaning which the learner can acquire, the levels of form, function and strategy. At the first level, the learner will have a certain knowledge of the language; next he will understand what the function of the language is but will not be able to put it into operation; at the level of strategy, he will be able to do so. The learner needs to know the components of the events in which he is to function. He must be aware of what role he is in; of what topics he is referring to; what these topics mean — the subject matter behind them; the settings in which he ought to function; whether he will have a close or distant relationship with his addressee — this can differ between languages and between socio-linguistic areas in the one language: he must also be aware of what linguistic skills he is to master. Finally, the question of textual and referential complexity must be decided, what sort of texts will be used and the comprehension and production modes.

On the level of attainment scale, we start with level A. It is my assertion, as I mentioned at the beginning of this paper, that every European learner has a few words of the foreign language at his disposal before he begins the language in a formalised way at school. It is surprising to find that even

in the remotest village, the young boys and girls have in their ear a number of sounds, a number of words which are perhaps clichés,which they identify as French. They fairly soon find out that within their own language they can make a word sound French by putting [õ] in place of [on]. This means that these learners are at level A before they begin French at school. Level B is the waystage level, which includes elementary syntax. It is easier to concentrate first on the "I" perspective, with I want, I have, can I etc. because the pupils have a lot to say about themselves. After "I", the "you" level comes in and "he" and "she" come in last because in order to talk about other people, the pupils must know quite a lot about "him" and "her" which can lead to difficulties. At this B stage, the learner has an interlanguage command in restricted situations and tasks within the scope of everyday experience. The C level is the threshold level where the learner can make himself understood within a restricted range of thematic areas, situations and tasks, oral and written. He can, for example, identify himself, fill in a simple form and, from this, he can provide a consistent explanation of his own background. He can also find out the same type of information from another. At this level the language is simple but very clearly organised. In a class where most of the learners are at the threshold level there may be a few who have not gone beyond the waystage. Nevertheless, these pupils can participate in all the lessons by understanding what is going on, making simple comments on the lesson and asking for clarification of what they do not understand.

At level E, which is the threshold level plus, the learners are able to express themselves with growing grammatical correctness in written, oral and text production and in monologues. They would still find it difficult to operate in a dialogue situation. Dialogues should be introduced at a later stage when the pupils can really identify the subtleties of what happens between people when they speak to one another. At level F, topic level 1, the vocabulary does not increase from the 2000 to 2500 words of the level below, but this level contains wider areas of topics and word references. One can, at this stage, talk about feelings, about future events and past or fictional events. It is followed by topic level 2, where the learner is able to discourse on texts and on other topics — he will have mastered a meta-language to do so — and he will be able to read works of fiction and non-fiction. Level G, project level 1, is where the learner has a certain study area or field such as technical English, business English, the English of science, and within that area, he is able to express himself. He is able to use the language as an expert in his own field, to talk to another expert or to talk to someone who is not an expert but who must function on the basis of his instructions. Level G is a very high level of competency. Level H, project level 2, is where the learner's competence approaches near-nativeness in defined domains.

SPECIFIC ASSUMPTIONS

I will conclude this paper by giving a brief description of traditional and novel approaches to language learning. I do not mean to imply that the traditional approaches are old-fashioned, or out-dated. On the contrary, in some countries of the world, they are even desirable. Novelty is not always best. The traditional approaches which I describe are what I take to be the sound foundation of any foreign language instruction in the normal traditional classroom.

PURPOSES:

The traditional purpose in learning a foreign language is to get to know the language structure; the more novel approach , to get to know the process of language use. This goes slightly beyond the traditional purpose, how far depends on the class, the teacher, the initial teacher-training, the in-service teacher-training and on the school syllabus. Mastering language skills is replaced in

the novel approach by personal and social development through mastery of language skills. In place of standards of formal performance, we think the learner should have an ample range of creative expression of meaning, even though he may not express himself in grammatically correct language. Language is traditionally seen as an end, but we now see it as a means.

CONTENTS:

Traditionally, the contents of the foreign language instruction are teacher-organised. We, on the other hand, see them as being at least partly learner-organised. I will explain this by describing a class which I had to deal with. The teacher had sent for me because the class was a disaster. The pupils were completely unmotivated and uninterested for some unknown reason. After a while, however, the reason became quite obvious. A book was being used in the class in which there was a picture of a farmer sitting on a tractor with a little dog in front of him and some cows standing underneath a tree. The caption read, "Mr. Brown is a farmer". That was a funny remark to make because obviously the man was a farmer, unless the story went on to say, "but before, he was a professor of English at the university". The story, however, did not go on; it ended there. The only observation the learners could have made was that for some strange reason the dog was sitting on the tractor, even though, as the sun was shining, the tractor would have been very hot and quite impossible for the dog to sit on. However, the pupils had no opportunity to say this; they were not called upon. I began to teach them. I asked them to suggest what we could do with the language in this lesson. One of them made a very good suggestion, that we could have Bonanza. He pointed out that we already had the long-horns — the cows underneath the tree! Soon the pupils were busy writing out words and putting then on the board in order to define the elements needed for Bonanza. Then they suggested that we make a film in English for English television about their own village. They very soon discovered that the word for pigs was not needed because there were no pigs; people did not have the time to look after them. Only three tractors were needed because all the other farmers had given up farming and had gone into industry. This quickly led us on to a number of very interesting suggestions of what could be done with the sentences, "He is not a farmer, he was a farmer. My father was a farmer but now he is not a farmer". Soon these sentences were being said reactively. Everything was then ready for the film,but first we had to appoint film teams who started us off by asking if we were ready to shoot the picture. One of the boys then began to describe his farm, and so we made the film, using, of course, the fictional word Bonanza. I also announced that I had a farm and the boys asked me questions about it, using the phrase "Haven't you?" which one of the film team had given them as an instruction. After a while, I asked them what they thought of my farm, to which they replied that the house was very nice, the cows were very nice and so on. I then asked them what they could do with the language and one of them said that they could be nice to a person. I told him to be nice to someone, so he went up to the teacher and told her that she had a very nice blouse. Then he turned around and said to us, "Sie ist rot geworden" — she's blushed! This for him was a clear demonstration of the illocutionary force of the language. They asked me then what else they could do with the language,so I told them they could express surprise that someone had not got something that they would be expected to have. One of them then went up to one of my students who had accompanied me on this school visit and asked him if he had not got a jacket. The student replied that he had not, that his father had the jacket, and they only had the one between them. The pupil thought this very funny: he had discovered that English had been the key to a terrific joke. These pupils had very well understood, apart from the foreign aspect, what language can be used for. This is what is meant by learner-organised. The learners in this class had organised half the lesson and had done much better than the book.

In the traditional approach, the focus is on language, in the novel approach, the focus is on content and the language learning is integrated with other behaviour. Structures, model tests and dialogues are replaced by experiences and self-expression. Traditional teaching is organised linearly, in step-by-step progression; in the novel approach, the teaching is cyclic. This means that the questions "What can we do with the language learnt today? What can we do with the language learnt yesterday" have been replaced, in the cyclic approach by, "What can we do with the language learnt yesterday, the day before yesterday and today?". Isolated skills have been replaced by integrated skills. Language learning is no longer seen as product-oriented but as process-oriented.

METHODS:

Traditionally the methods are transmitted by the teacher but in the new approach, the methods are interpreted by learners and teacher. The need for this change is very clear from my earlier example of the teacher who brought the orange and the apple and the other objects into the classroom. Had the learner who could not see the answer been given the chance to state his problem in German, the teacher would have learnt from the learner his mode of learning, his hypothesis about the language. It is essential that the teacher should be able to do this rather than merely transmitting the methods. The traditional method is based on instruction - record - recall: the novel method is based on involvement - use - creative generalisation. Traditionally the methods are predictable and closed. In the newer approach, they are unpredictable and open, because the teacher may have to change his methods if he finds they do not lead to the aims that he and the learner would like to reach. It has been thought traditionally that all learners learn the same, at the same time and in the same way. Now we realise that all learners learn different things at different times and in different ways but within the same scope of planning. This means that in the end, all the learners will have learnt the same thing, but not at the same time nor in the same way.

EVALUATION:

Evaluation is very much learner-directed in the traditional classroom. The teacher evaluates what the learner has learnt. Following the novel approach, we prefer to evaluate what the curriculum and what the book have produced. In the second class which I described, the children, when they were given the opportunity, showed that the farmer in their text-book was ridiculous and that he had nothing to do with their own experiences of farmers. One soon discovered that the learner in his self-assessment of the materials came up with more intelligent ideas than the author of the book had. The teacher learnt much more from the learners than if he had asked them to repeat what was in the book. In traditional teaching, the learners undergo regular teacher tests: in more novel teaching, we prefer the learners to assess themselves. Traditional evaluation is form-oriented: we prefer criterion-referenced evaluation.

LEARNER ROLE:

The learner's role is traditionally to receive, to practice and to score. This is essential in language learning, but in the novel approach it has been expanded to interpreting, hypothesising and creating. Where it is traditionally seen to be essential to respond correctly, we now see that it is essential to become aware of one's own performance, even of one's incapacity to respond correctly. The older idea is to keep what you have understood and learnt to yourself, to function adequately in order to reach your final examination: the newer idea is to share your learning with others, to see how other people learn, how people learn differently and how perhaps you can learn differently if you adopt the other person's way of learning. Instead of expecting the learner to

conform to the teacher's criteria, we encourage the learner to be original and to take risks. We no longer want him to be the teacher's acolyte but we expect him to commit himself to an interpretation of the lesson. Traditionally, the pupil is told to expect the learning of a language to be difficult: now we tell the pupil that he will learn a language by using the relevant abilities that he already has.

TEACHER ROLE:

The teacher assumes in the traditional classroom that performance equals learning. In many instances, this is the only thing he can do: he can only see what has been learnt from the pupil's performance. But one must distinguish between performance and language because many learners can perform but they do not learn. They perform for a test and then it is finished. A lot of people learn desperately and learn very well but do not function well in tests. They learn things that are not asked in tests and they do not learn what is asked. Therefore one must be very careful. No objective test system has ever been designed which is adequate to assess a person's command of the language. All that can be tested are the items which constitute the actual command of the language.

The traditional teacher believes that success lies in the extent to which the learner does what he, the teacher, wants. The more modern teacher believes that every learner can and does learn continuously. The traditional teacher concentrates on short-term achievements. The more modern teacher sees achievement as a long-term process: even if the learner does not master the subjunctive, he can still communicate quite well without it. The learner needs to be reminded continually that, under certain circumstances, not using the subjunctive might be a source of misunderstanding. He can himself observe misunderstandings which may occur between the teacher and a very good pupil where the pupil has completely misinterpreted something because he did not recognise the subjunctive. The next time, the pupil can come up with the subjunctive idea himself, although he has not yet mastered its use. Some learners can learn the rules in this way, but not the language as the language has to be developed more slowly. The traditional teacher tries to avoid or abolish error, whereas the more modern teacher expects error and learns about the learner from it. The traditional teacher evaluates the learners according to his own criteria; in the novel approach, we encourage a communicative milieu in which the learner can shape his awareness through interaction. We also no longer consider it the teacher's role to direct the learner along the road to the teacher's objectives. Instead, we try to adopt tactics which will help the learner to go on learning without our direction. Nor do we assume that "real" learning has to be classroom-based: we assume learning occurs anywhere anytime. We do not believe language teaching to be socially neutral, but to be socially engaged.

* *

What I have described is the kind of approach that we try to follow in curriculum design in Hesse. Hesse is a very small part of Germany, right in the middle of the country. My university is called the Julius Liebig University. Affiliated to it is H.I.L.F. ("help") the Hessisches Institut für Lehrer Fortbildung. This is the in-service training centre for Hesse. The Council of Europe, through the Threshold Level, Waystage and Un Niveau Seuil, has helped us very greatly to specify the basic needs of the learners and the basic elements to be taught. We have changed these into teaching units and into text-books. One of the text-books is called Bridges, another, Contacts. There are three volumes in Contacts: the first one in concerned with how to make contacts in situations;

the second, how to make contacts when talking about topics; the final one, how to make contacts when involved in a project. In a project, the outer world is more essential than oneself, whereas in a situation, one can master that situation. One can also handle a topic quite well but one cannot control it to the same extent as a situation. In this way the learner himself knows from the title of the book what stage he is at.

In Germany there is also an organisation called B.A.G., the Bundesarbeitsgemeinshaft, which is a federal group of practising teachers who get together twice or three times a year to discuss their mutual problems in the implementation of the syllabus. They submit and discuss their own material in what we call the curriculum market. Their material is then revised and put on file so that we know what has been used with adequate success. This is a very honest private body of teachers who come up with bright ideas and want to implement these ideas themselves as their own minister for education is slow in changing the syllabus. When these people, for example, have difficulties in teaching across the ability range, the group comes up with a very solid idea which fits neatly within the overall pedagogic concept. In this way, very practical work is done within the Bundesarbeitsgemeinshaft. We have connections also with the University of Lancaster, the University of Exeter, with certain publishers and with T.V. and radio stations. The Fachverband Moderner Fremdsprachen has a lot of influence, as have the International Association of the Teachers of English as a Foreign Language and other organisations. There is international co-operation between Lancaster, Giessen, Honingen, Zagreb and a number of other organisations in Austria and Spain, where people follow the same structure and exchange teaching modules where possible. At the moment, we are using a number of modules from Yugoslavia which are very well organised. We find we can fit these into our courses. U.S.I.S.,the United States Information Service, the British Council and the Goethe Institute are coming together at present as they very often support regional curriculum development. Eventually there will be co-operation with these bodies also.

The Bundesarbeitsgemeinshaft has as its members practically all our writers or would-be writers of text-books, because these people know they can get information in the group from practising teachers. I may come in, humbly, as a university professor, if I have something to offer. If I have not, I have to keep silent and listen. There is no great reverence for the university professor as such, unless he can solve the teacher's problems. The university has to play a part with its resources; it often has to supply native speakers or theoretical ideas to generalise what the teachers have been saying. For example, we have to come up with concepts for the T.V. and radio people in many instances. However, we can only contribute in this way if we are aware of what is going on in the practical field. Groups such as B.A.G. are made up of people who have some time at their disposal. These are likely to be those who have just been divorced — so we are likely to have more people with time available than you have, people who are not married, couples where both are teachers, women who have brought up their children and now find they have some free time to themselves, people who just want to show to themselves that they can still do something worthwhile. They make up a very nice group.

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DISCUSSION

Question: *I was very interested to hear you put so much emphasis on discourse as distinct from the artificial rules of language learning. What role does the mother tongue of the child play in this?*

Answer: In many instances it rather depends on the type of teaching that has gone on in the mother tongue. Often, the learner has to be made aware of how he functions in his own language before he can see how the other language functions. For example, the learner can be given the task of going up to someone's home and asking for them. Unexpectedly, the grandmother comes to the door whereas the learner wants to talk to the young boy. The grandmother knows that the boy is not available because he is watching television upstairs. The learner is aware that in a task of this kind, he has first to segment the operation into acts or sequences of acts. On the other hand, perhaps he has never been in such a situation, so that it does not seem to him to be a problem. Or maybe he has always avoided going to places where he knew someone else might turn up instead of the person he was looking for. The teacher in such a case can tell the learner to work out what he does in his mother-tongue. In such an operation, one sees that one must have an opening phrase, then a prepositional phrase and one has to come to some satisfactory close — in view of the fact that the old woman may perhaps want to watch the same T.V. programme herself. The young learner need not use this terminology to discuss his acts. In this way, one may discuss the textual progression which is faster than the progression of utterances. In another instance, one may have a complex text or two complex texts with deviating, conflicting ideas and one may discuss them in the mother tongue.

At all times, the teacher may carry on a discussion with some of the learners in French when another learner comes up with a very interesting idea which he has to express in his mother tongue. He is then given an answer to this in French. This is the form of international communication which is used in bodies such as the Council of Europe. At their meetings, I would never speak in French but in English or German because I know other people will understand those languages. By using this form of communication, the learner still participates in the class and the other learners take it for granted that he has something to say — another learner in the class may sum up what he has said in French. In this way, the language of the learner is taken into consideration and, of course, contrastively as well, in the basic structuring of the learning matter.

Question: *You called into question the usefulness of dialogue. Could you say a little more about that, please?*

Answer: Of course. One tends to overdo things if one wishes to make a point. Let me give you an example of how we suggest you use dialogue. Here is a taped dialogue we have made:

"I have got a new friend".

"Have you? Who is it?"

"His name is Kemal. He comes from Turkey. He lives in Munich, Germany. His brother is a taxi-driver. He speaks German and Turkish. He speaks German better than Turkish".

"Do you speak German and Turkish?"

"Only Turkish. We were in Turkey for five years. Kemal lives in a flat with three rooms. He has three brothers and two sisters. His hobby is swimming".

"Interesting. But a three-roomed flat is small for a family of seven".

By listening to this, the learner gets an inflated version of what he himself can organise. In the text-book, all the elements of the dialogue are shown in a diagram. There is a picture of Kemal, a sign with Tr on it for Turkey, another sign for Munich and another for taxi-driver. The learner is also given the words GERMAN and Turkish, with German in capital letters because Kemal speaks German better than Turkish unfortunately. The pupil goes through the dialogue, reads it and perhaps does not think of it but concentrates on the instrumental use of the language. The teacher then can pretend that one of the pupils is Kemal or indeed there may be a Kemal in the class as is very often the case.

The other pupils are not called upon to be John or Mary or anyone else in the dialogues. They are simply called upon to be themselves in the situation and they may wish to behave quite differently. One of the speakers in the dialogue may seem to the pupils to behave in an undesirable way. In another case, their whole set of rules according to which they function in society and in their families may be on a different level. The pupils can be called upon to explain in their mother tongue why they behaved differently from John or Mary. They may come up with very good reasons -- for instance, that Mary's behaviour was sissy. This can lead on to a discussion in which the pupils will have to work out what they mean by "sissy", what their set of values are when they call certain behaviour "sissy", whereas they may have been using such a word as a cliché. In such a class, the value of language teaching for general developmental purposes comes in and not merely the learning of one particular language item. The language item will mean much more to the learner once he has considered its full meaning and implications than if he is just repeating something which is meaningless to him.

Also, by listening to the dialogue, the pupils are exposed to proper English which may make them change their own accents. Segments of the dialogue can be used to drive home the correct intonation and pronunciation of the language. Yet they should not be compelled to imitate the English people in these dialogues because they are not English and have not the mannerisms of the English nor their culture. They must start off from where they are. For them to imitate the English and to reach near native pronunciation, it would be necessary to reach near mimicry identification. Yet there are a number of Germans who speak English with a German accent, who will retain this accent for the rest of their lives but who function admirably. There are others who pick up an accent immediately. It has nothing to do with intelligence but is a special gift.

Question: *I very much take the point which you have made just now, about not seeking to instil near native competence right away. It is clear that, as you say, the whole business of accent, gesture, cultural background is not going to be absorbed except over a long period of time. But, to return to what you were saying about error tolerance earlier, is there not a basic normative standard of correctness and a minimal standard of acceptability for a foreigner using a language which one ought to strive for? What is the extent of one's error tolerance? Is it not going to create problems and inhibitions in the learner if he finds that he is rejected by a particular linguistic community because he does not reach this minimal normative standard of correctness?*

Answer: I quite agree with you. It is part of the process of learning that the learner becomes aware of his present state of language command. For example, it used to be the custom in German schools to teach idioms at a very early stage because they sounded English. Now the Germans are catsing and dogsing through the rains and sound utterly ridiculous. The Germans were taught in forms. They over-idiomised the English language and will do so for a long time. The reason

for this is that certain things were stressed as the norm which are not,in fact, normative in that way. One has to be careful of this. To take pronunciation, this is something which has to be learnt. It has to be learnt item-wise too, whereas it now seems to us that grammar, the structure of the language, is learnt in a more global generative fashion. In the use of words, one has to have a very narrow, practically non-existant error tolerance because words refer to things in a specific way. When the learner has learnt the meaning of the word in one context, he should try to see its meaning in other contexts and see how it fits in with the other words he knows. In this way he builds up a tree of structural words, what we call a sociogram, in which the range of meaning of the word in its relation to words with some common meaning is clear. There is no point in giving the learner the meaning of the word in his mother tongue. He has to find its meaning within its own semantic field.

As far as pronunciation is concerned, many German pupils say "ze ozer" whereas the teacher wants them to say "the other" but eventually accepts "de oder". This sound nicer to the listener but does not teach the learner to speak correctly. The German learner has two problems here. For one thing, he places the German 'd' as in du Doofer, du Dummkopf at the place where the 'th' belongs, and therefore the only thing one has to do is to say God, d,d, and once the German has learnt this particular position of the tongue for 'd', the other position is immediately available for the 'th' sounds. This is a matter of good teaching, not a matter of good learning. Some people can learn this sound without difficulty, but for others, it is a matter of organisation, to get it away from the guttural area. Many Germans cannot pronounce the sound because they waste too much air in the guttural area and therefore they never produce proper English speech segments. In this case again, it is definitely up to the teacher, not the learner,to make good use of error avoidance.

In the case of grammar, much depends on the purpose for which and the situations in which the learner will employ the language. The teachers in my area said that it was impossible to tolerate errors when we first advocated this idea. They said that mistakes must be avoided; that otherwise the consequences would be that the same mistakes would turn up over and over again. It is funny, however, that this never happens in the first language. The child has an incomplete grammar which becomes complete after a while, because, in the grammatical and structural element, the grammar is learnt not by memorising the sentences but by memorising and internalising the rules according to which the sentences are formed. In this area, tolerance can be given to errors without much difficulty for a certain time and under certain circumstances. It depends on whether you work productively or reproductively. The teachers, however, complained that this was a ridiculous suggestion, so we asked them to come to the university to sit down and discuss it over a cup of tea. We asked them if they would mind if the discussion was recorded in case there might be some interesting points which we might like to go back to later on. So while we were talking, someone was sitting outside the group writing down all the mistakes the teachers and the native speakers were making. We ended up with an enormous list of mistakes. One of the teachers said that it had not been fair because they were unprepared. We replied that the children come into class every morning unprepared, so, if they have something they want to say, they should be allowed to say it the way they do. The teachers, after all, have learnt English for nine years at school and for another eight semesters at the university where they concentrate on English alone or on English and French. No one in this world can live and survive professionally on a knowledge of language alone. He must have some other knowledge or skill also. Even an interpreter must know more than Irish and French. He must have some other area of knowledge so that he can interpret in that area. The teachers felt more inclined to accept error tolerance after this meeting.

I hope I have made myself quite clear on this. I do not advocate tolerance of the kind of mistakes which can be avoided.

Question: *Are your teachers trained in corrective phonetics? Not many Irish teachers are in the ordinary way.*

Answer: I am not talking about the teachers in Germany as a whole because I could not, with so many regional varieties, professional varieties and so on. In my own university and in the Hesse university — and Hesse is a very small part of Germany, teachers are given the following training whether they are primary school teachers taking English as a second language or secondary teachers. They are all trained at the university and are given a proper training in phonetics and phonology, first from a theoretical point of view and then one semester is given to corrective and creative use of language sounds in the classroom. Then the teachers have five years field experience in either group teaching or team teaching because they can not yet endure the whole lesson on their own. In this way, they see what goes wrong in their teaching. We try to explain these difficulties to them,linking their practical teaching experience onto their more theoretical experience. When they have left the university, they do further professional training before taking their second state examination. It can be seen from this that they get quite a good intensive training.

We train teachers not academicians. We take it for granted that they are interested academicians. They can get French the way we feel it ought to be spoken because we send them off to France. But we cannot take it for granted that they have gone through an experience which shows them how to teach properly because they have gone through a school which is different from the school we would like to see. Therefore, we feel that, as a university, we have a very strong obligation to teach them how to teach. We feel that,although teaching is something that is narrowed down to the school, in fact every person, whether he is a master of arts or a doctor, will eventually be a teacher. We know that 90% of the people in an industrial society will be teachers at some time, as parents, or at work, for instance, teaching another to use certain appliances. Since this is so, everyone should know how to explain something so that others can really get the knowledge from him. We, and in particular my colleagues from the more traditional scholarly areas, feel this very strongly. There is no use teaching literature at university level unless this eventually leads to people buying and reading books,because without this, university professors are finished.

Question: *You said earlier on that we should start to work from the situation which we have. At the moment in Ireland, we have five years of language teaching in the schools. At the end of three years, the pupils sit an examination called Intermediate Certificate after which they usually go on for another two years to the Leaving Certificate. At Leaving Certificate, there are two levels, pass or ordinary level and honours level. But because of high failure rates of over 30% at Intermediate Certificate, there have been suggestions that perhaps there should be three different syllabuses for the high, average and low ability students. What do you think of these suggestions?*

Answer: First of all, I do not believe that before experiencing the learning of a foreign language for at least three years it is possible to make any decision whatsoever. Even at the end of three years it is not possible to decide that some students are slow learners and others are not. What standards are you measuring them against? Whether they are slow or not depends on our teaching. There are some pupils who pick everything up very quickly, but once we take academic standards into consideration and get them to answer questions on literary texts they do badly.

Being realistic about it, a foreign language in any school system I know has a selective function, except in bilingual situations. So that eventually one has to be selective. At this point one must be clear about one's objectives and about the criteria on which one bases the selection. I feel that the threshold level, whatever it will be, should be clearly specified for the first three years. It may be an Irish threshold level. I do not believe the Council of Europe threshold level is exactly what we want because it is based on the assumption that the learner goes into the foreign country as a tourist, whereas we have more experience of the learner within the classroom, which should be taken into consideration. The threshold level should be specified very clearly as something attainable within the four hundred hours or so which are available for the teaching of a foreign language. Two thirds of this time should be used to attain this threshold level competence with which the learner could participate in any given situation in a society where the people speak the foreign language. The remaining time should be used for a variety of purposes, so that each learner can concentrate on the area in which he is best. One learner may be a very rapid reader. Another may be a quick learner of restricted sets of written texts, like the secretary who masters a restricted set of letters. It is good to make the learners aware that we appreciate these talents. The remaining one third of the hours is very well used by branching off in this way. On the other hand, if the students are divided into separate groups from an early stage, what usually happens is that the talented child who is usually from a certain stratum of society goes ahead, leaving the others far behind. Then it might be decided to try a non-selective approach, as we did in Germany. We wanted to be fair to everyone so we took all the pupils into the grammar school and lowered the standards in the lowest group until there was no motivation whatsoever for the faster learners. People feel that this just does not work. We have found that the syllabus organised in the way I have described works well in Germany. We have also found that it works well in Yugoslavia. If you organise your syllabus in this way, moulding it into shape according to your needs in this country, you will find that the fast learners will get what they need and will also get the experience of teaching the language, of explaining the language to someone who is slower than they are, which will make them understand language in a more articulate way. The slow learners also get along well with this sort of syllabus but it is somehow a little shaky for the middle range of students. Teachers tend to turn to the very slow learner and to forget that the middle ability learner can organise and be organised very well. We have found that self-study skills kits help this learner a lot because he is very happy to be left on his own.

I am for an integrated differentiated syllabus based on a threshold level but giving different learners different opportunities within each lesson from the very beginning.

The End